



Mended Hearts®
of Atlanta

The Aorta
Reporter



Open enrollment ends December 7!

Navigating Medicare Advantage

Medicare Advantage (Part C) plans, offered by private insurers, bundle Original Medicare benefits (Parts A and B) with extras like dental, vision, and prescription drugs. Popular for their low or zero premiums, these plans cover over half of the 65 million Medicare beneficiaries, providing a one-stop alternative to traditional fee-for-service coverage.

In 2025, enrollment hit a record 54 percent of eligible seniors, up from prior years, driven by enhanced benefits amid rising health costs.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) approved 7,029 plans nationwide, averaging 42 options per beneficiary—including 34 with drug coverage (MA-PD)—available in nearly every county.

Open Enrollment (October 15–December 7, 2025) allows switches, with many plans maintaining \$0 premiums but tweaking networks and copays. Insurers like UnitedHealthcare and Humana dominate, emphasizing telehealth and wellness perks. Looking to 2026, availability remains robust but slightly slimmer: beneficiaries will average 32 MA-PD plans, down from 2025, though 100 percent have access to at least one.

CMS data shows 47 plans in key markets, a dip from 51, amid insurer consolidations. Expect changes: premiums may rise modestly (e.g., Part B standard at \$185.50/month), while Part D catastrophic caps increase to \$2,000 out-of-pocket.

New rules end a controversial prior authorization pilot and cap out-of-network payments, potentially easing access but sparking network shifts.

Humana and UHC pledge expanded dental/vision coverage in most plans. As costs climb review options at [Medicare.gov/plan-compare](https://www.Medicare.gov/plan-compare) during Open Enrollment. Changes take effect January 1, 2026.

Pharmaceutical companies to sell drugs directly to patients

Several drug manufacturers will sell certain prescription medicines directly to American patients and discount other high-priced drugs. According to Reuters, AstraZeneca, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Eli Lilly, Novo Nordisk and other drugmakers have agreed to discount certain drugs for taxpayer-funded Medicaid plans and sell other drugs directly through their websites for cash-paying customers, bypassing pharmacies and pharmacy benefit managers. U.S. patients currently face the highest prescription drug prices in the world.



What to do when your pill looks different

Suppose your pill was always a tan color, but your refill bottle is full of blue pills. Or maybe it was round, but now it is oblong. What is up with that?

Often patients just stop taking the medication, which is a bad idea. In fact, according to Johns Hopkins University, in some cases it could be life threatening.

Researchers looked at patients who began taking a generic heart medicine after having a heart attack. Among those whose drugs remained at the same dosage but changed appearance, 66 percent of patients stopped taking it when the pills changed shape, and 34 percent stopped taking it when the pill was a different color.

Pharmacies sometimes change their drug suppliers, so pills can have a different color or shape each time they do.

If your prescription looks different when you refill it, call the pharmacy to verify that it's the correct medication.

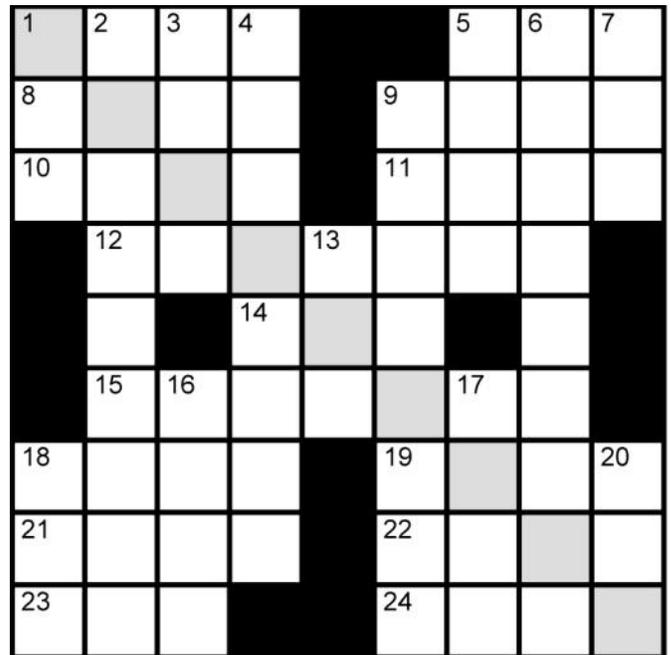
You can also find several websites that will help you identify the pill. Simply search for "identify pill."

Quick Pic

The headline is a clue to the answer in the diagonal.

Across

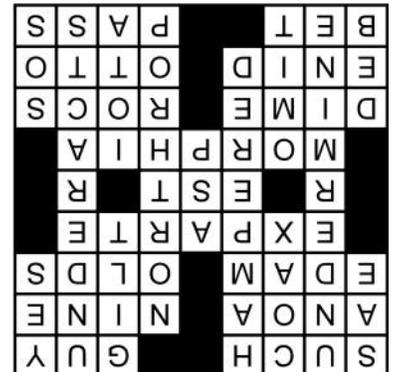
- 1. Similar
- 5. Chap
- 8. Celebes ox
- 9. Opening time, maybe
- 10. ___ cheese
- 11. Cutlass, e.g.
- 12. From one side only
- 14. "C' ___ la vie!"
- 15. Narcotic
- 18. Kind of store
- 19. Enormous birds of myth
- 21. "Idylls of the King" character
- 22. "Beetle Bailey" dog
- 23. "Wanna ___?"
- 24. Hail Mary, e.g.



Down

- 1. Ed.'s request
- 2. Sabotage
- 3. Cajole
- 4. Impeded
- 5. Gold-plated
- 6. Restrained stage performances
- 7. "Absolutely!"
- 9. A chemistry

- Nobelist: 1946
- 13. Death on the Nile cause, perhaps
- 16. Leave out
- 17. Bit
- 18. Center of a ball?
- 20. "Help!"



FDA approves another Alzheimer's blood test

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently approved a new blood test to help primary care physicians rule out Alzheimer's disease in older adults. According to CNN, the Elecsys pTau181 test is designed for patients 55 and older who are exhibiting symptoms of cognitive decline. Further assessment is recommended for patients who receive positive test results.



"Which came first, the chicken, the egg or the nog?"

You'll Need It in January 2026

If you haven't gotten your flu shot yet, don't wait—get one now!

It's still not too late to protect yourself from the typical surge in flu cases that often peaks in January.

This year's 2025-2026 flu vaccine has been updated, offering improved protection against circulating strains. Advances in vaccine technology, including better strain prediction and production methods, aim to enhance effectiveness.

While no vaccine can guarantee protection against all flu strains due to their evolving nature, getting vaccinated reduces the severity of illness and lowers the risk of complications like pneumonia if you do get infected.

The 2024-2025 season saw challenges with emerging variants, but this year's vaccine targets the predominant influenza A strains (H3N2 and H1N1) and influenza B lineages currently circulating globally, based on real-time surveillance.

Today's approach includes agile manufacturing processes and, in some regions, the option for vaccines tailored for vulnerable groups.

The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get a flu shot annually. With new options like nasal spray vaccines and broader availability through pharmacies and telehealth platforms in 2025, it's easier than ever to stay protected. Act now to safeguard your health this winter! If you have any questions about whether the flu vaccine is right for you, be sure to talk with your doctor.

The new scent for men and women draws ire -- and maybe flies



Forget the earthy, spicy male scents of yore: English Leather, Old Spice, Stetson. Time for a new dynamic. Like sugar cookie.

Yup, the personal care industry is all-in for sweet scents even for men and women.

Personal care company Native teamed up with Dunkin' Donuts to create Vanilla Sprinkle deodorants. Their new lotion is Blueberry Cobbler and their new shampoo is Boston Kreme, like the pie.

They aren't the only ones: Bath & Body Works and Milk Bar bakery launched Birthday Cake body spray and hand sanitizer.

The Wall Street Journal interviewed two men about their fondness for sweet scents. It doesn't always go over well. Caramel Swirl body spray actually drew out,, loud criticism in changing rooms.

There are still plenty of leather, woody, and earthy scents for men, but doughnut fragrances? Maybe they make your love interest hungry.

Nasal spray flu vaccines now available

Nasal spray flu vaccines are an alternative to traditional injectable flu shots.



As of October 21, 2025, they are approved for use in healthy, non-pregnant individuals aged 2 through 49 years by the CDC.

How They Work: The nasal spray contains a live, weakened form of the flu virus. When administered into the nostrils, it stimulates an immune response in the mucosal lining of the respiratory tract, mimicking natural infection without causing illness in healthy people.

Studies show LAIV can be as effective as the injectable vaccine in healthy individuals, though efficacy varies year to year depending on how well it matches circulating strains. Recent updates in 2025 have improved strain selection based on global surveillance data.

It's needle-free, making it a popular choice for those who dislike shots. It's also convenient, often available at pharmacies or clinics, and can be a good option for kids or adults who tolerate it well.

The spray is not suitable for everyone—people with weakened immune systems, certain chronic conditions (such as asthma), or those in close contact with immunocompromised individuals should stick to the shot.

Nasal spray vaccines are widely accessible in the U.S., often stocked alongside injectable options. Check with your healthcare provider or local pharmacy for the latest supply.

Are you taking your reflux meds the right way?

Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) can relieve the heartburn and discomfort of gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), as well as heal damage done to the esophagus by stomach acids.

For the best results, be sure to use them correctly. A study in The American Journal of Gastroenterology shows that 61 percent of users do not.

Following directions

The researchers interviewed patients taking over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription PPIs. They found that dosing frequency and timing were inconsistent, leading to poor symptom relief. Just 37 percent of OTC users took them correctly; 47 percent took prescribed drugs correctly; and drugs prescribed by a gastroenterologist were taken correctly 71 percent of the time.

Another study shows that only one-third of physicians instructed patients to take the medicine before breakfast. But gastroenterologists did.

What PPIs do

PPIs reduce the amount of acid produced in your stomach. Doctors at Johns Hopkins University say that, ideally, they should be taken once a day before the first meal of the day.

OTC PPIs include Prilosec, Prevacid 24HR and Zegerid. Prescription PPIs include Nexium, Prevacid, Protonix and AciphHex. Always use the lowest dosage for the shortest time possible.

Increasing their effectiveness

- * Take your pill 20 to 30 minutes before your first meal.
- * If prescribed two pills a day, take the second before dinner.
- * Don't skip doses. PPIs are most effective if taken consistently.
- * Avoid taking an over-the-counter PPI for more than 14 days, and no more than three series a year, without a doctor's approval.
- * If you've taken an OTC for more than 14 days you should ask your doctor if you should see a gastroenterologist for a better diagnosis or treatment.
- * It takes up to seven days of continuous use for maximum effect, but some individuals feel better after each pill.



Air Fryer Fried Okra

Calories
112 Per Serving
Protein
5g Per Serving
Fiber
3g Per Serving

Ingredients

1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt-free Cajun or Creole seasoning blend
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1 large egg, lightly beaten
1/2 cup yellow cornmeal
8 ounces fresh okra, stems discarded, cut into 1/2-inch slices OR
2 cups frozen cut okra, thawed and patted dry
Cooking spray

Directions

1. Preheat the air fryer to 400°F.
2. In a medium shallow dish, stir together the flour, seasoning blend, salt and pepper.
3. Put the egg and cornmeal in separate medium shallow dishes. Set the three dishes and a large plate or platter in a row, assembly-line fashion. Using a slotted spoon, transfer about one-fourth of the okra to the flour dish, stirring to coat.
4. Transfer to the egg dish, letting any excess drip off. Then transfer to the cornmeal dish, stirring to coat and gently shaking off any excess. Arrange the okra in a single layer in the air fryer basket. (Don't overcrowd; work in batches as needed.) Lightly spray with cooking spray.
5. Cook for 10 to 14 minutes, or until golden brown, turning once halfway through and lightly spraying with cooking spray.



Recipe borrowed from <https://recipes.heart.org/en/recipes/air-fryer-fried-okra>

A Sense of Humor to lighten your day!

"Sometimes I lie awake at night and ask, 'Where have I gone wrong?' Then a voice says to me, 'This is going to take more than one night.'"

---Charles M. Schulz (through the character of Charlie Brown)

Borrow money from pessimists -- they don't expect it back.

I almost had a psychic girlfriend, But she left me before we met.

My mechanic told me, "I couldn't repair your brakes, so I made your horn louder."

The hardness of the butter is proportional to the softness of the bread.

A man walks into a library and asks the librarian, "Do you have any books on Pavlov's dogs and Schrodinger's cats?" The librarian says, "It rings a bell, but I'm not sure if its here."

My wife told me the car wasn't running well because there was water in the carburetor. I asked where the car was. She told me, "In the lake."

A sweater I bought was picking up static electricity, so I returned it to the store. They gave me a new one free of charge.

Knock, Knock. "Who's there?" "Olive" "Olive who" Olive the other reindeer used to laugh and call him names.....

